



North Central Idaho News

CLEARWATER, IDAHO, LATAH, LEWIS & NEZ PERCE COUNTIES

ECONOMIC TRENDS

The August unemployment rate for the Lewiston Metropolitan Statistical Area increased slightly to 4.7 percent, but total employment remained steady. Some industries — transportation, information services and agricultural services — continued to show signs of employment growth.

SPECIAL TOPICS:

Area Universities and Colleges

Enrollment at all three area institutions of higher learning is down this year. The University of Idaho saw the sharpest decline, down 737 state-wide, to 11,739 students for a 5.9 percent drop. Students on Washington State University's Pullman campus declined just 267, or 1 percent, to 18,423. Lewis-Clark State College also reported a 1 percent reduction to 3,394 students. However, the number of freshmen coming directly from high school to Lewis-Clark rose 8 percent over last year. Recruiters have been targeting those students because they tend to register for full-time classes and stay in school for a full four years. Lewis-Clark has also added 200 new residence hall beds that have contributed to the increase in freshman.

Elsewhere, Idaho State University in Pocatello posted the biggest decrease among Idaho's public four-year institutions at 9 percent. The student count was down 1,300, according to the Idaho State Journal. The only four-year public college or university in Idaho to see higher enrollment was Boise State University. Its student count was up 277 to a record 18,876.

Housing Market

A national slowdown in housing price increases has yet to hit Moscow. "Deflated would not be one of the

North Central Idaho Table 1: Lewiston MSA Labor Force & Employment
Nez Perce County, Idaho and Asotin County, Washington

	Aug 2006*	Jul 2006	Aug 2005	% Change From	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
<i>Seasonally Adjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	28,750	28,740	29,530	0.0	-2.6
Unemployment	1,350	1,330	1,580	1.5	-14.6
% of Labor Force Unemployed	4.7	4.6	5.4		
Total Employment	27,400	27,410	27,950	0.0	-2.0
<i>Unadjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	28,320	28,570	29,020	-0.9	-2.4
Unemployment	1,140	1,220	1,350	-6.6	-15.6
% of Labor Force Unemployed	4.0	4.3	4.7		
Total Employment	27,180	27,350	27,670	-0.6	-1.8
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs** - NAICS	26,690	26,780	27,010	-0.3	-1.2
<i>Goods-Producing Industries</i>	4,530	4,510	4,680	0.4	-3.2
Natural Resources & Mining	260	260	210	0.0	23.8
Construction	1,270	1,260	1,440	0.8	-11.8
Manufacturing	3,000	2,990	3,030	0.3	-1.0
Wood Product Manufacturing	550	550	570	0.0	-3.5
Food Manufacturing	30	30	30	0.0	0.0
Paper Manufacturing	1,110	1,110	1,130	0.0	-1.8
Other Manufacturing	1,310	1,300	1,300	0.8	0.8
<i>Service-Providing Industries</i>	22,160	22,270	22,330	-0.5	-0.8
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	5,470	5,500	5,440	-0.5	0.6
Wholesale Trade	680	690	670	-1.4	1.5
Retail Trade	3,450	3,470	3,500	-0.6	-1.4
Utilities	90	90	90	0.0	0.0
Transportation & Warehousing	1,250	1,250	1,180	0.0	5.9
Information	450	450	410	0.0	9.8
Financial Activities	1,830	1,830	1,850	0.0	-1.1
Professional & Business Services	1,590	1,630	1,760	-2.5	-9.7
Education & Health Services	4,410	4,430	4,390	-0.5	0.5
Leisure & Hospitality	2,420	2,400	2,580	0.8	-6.2
Other Services	1,080	1,100	1,130	-1.8	-4.4
Government Education	2,180	2,240	1,980	-2.7	10.1
Government Administration	1,950	1,910	2,020	2.1	-3.5
Government Tribes	780	780	770	0.0	1.3

*Preliminary Estimate

**Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month

words I would remotely use to describe our market," says Debbie Loaiza, owner of Bennett and Associates Real Estate in Moscow. "It continues to be very strong and steady." The average home price in Moscow climbed by \$10,368 to \$209,156 in the last year.

"Affordable" homes sell briskly. All 17 homes priced between \$150,000 and \$200,000 sold before ground was broken at a private

housing development called Villages at Southgate on the east side of Moscow.

Home buyers in the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley may be hesitating just a bit before they make a purchase. "It's still steady. It's just not quite as wild as it was," says Pam Trees, associate broker at Tomlinson Black in Lewiston. What Lewiston-Clarkston Valley Realtors are seeing might be connected with a national trend. A federal study found that increases in home prices had their biggest slowdown in 30 years during the second quarter of 2006. Nationally, housing prices rose 1.17 percent in April, May and June, compared with 3.65 percent for the same three months in 2005.

Realtors in Lewiston and Clarkston were scrounging to find houses that met buyers' needs just about three months ago, but now some of that pressure has eased, Trees says. "It hasn't completely slipped to a buyers' market yet, but it is softening," says Loretta Sandy, associate broker with Windermere Real Estate in Lewiston. Still, prices for homes in the Lewiston-Clarkston Valley remain strong. The average Lewiston-Clarkston Valley home price was \$160,773 for the six months ending in August, about \$20,000 more than for the same time one year earlier.

AREA DEVELOPMENTS

Clearwater County

- The Elk River Free Library District was awarded a \$163,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to establish a high-speed wireless Internet network in the community. Until now the library's four computers were the only place in Elk River with high-speed access, which is through a satellite feed, said Library District Director Margaret A. Patterson. It has been almost impossible for residents to take classes online, and local businesses have not been able to sell products on Web sites, Patterson said. Installation of the new system is expected to be completed by July 2007. The library will become Elk City's high-speed Internet service provider and prices should be reasonable since the infrastructure is being paid for with the federal grant.

Idaho and Lewis counties

- The Idaho Farm Service Agency State Committee has decided to allow emergency grazing of land enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program in 13 counties — Bingham, Blaine, Bonneville, Clark, Elmore, Gem, Gooding, Idaho, Lincoln, Nez Perce, Oneida, Payette and Power. The committee hoped the emergency authorization would assist livestock producers following the loss of more than

400,000 acres of grazing land to wildfires across the state. According to state Farm Service Executive Director Wayne Hammon, this special emergency authority may be used by eligible conservation reserve participants to temporarily move livestock to conservation reserve land for up to 60 days with no reduction in U.S. Department of Agriculture payments. Participants must first contact their local Farm Service Agency County Office to identify the ground for grazing. Each application will be reviewed and modifications made on a case-by-case basis as necessary grazing approval is given.

Latah County

- The skilled nursing facility at Latah Health Services closed in September. Officials said about 36 patients were transferred to other Moscow facilities offering skilled nursing. The decision to close the facility was made by the board of directors of Latah Health Services and the Latah County Commission. The facility is owned by the county. County Commissioner Jack Nelson, an ex-officio member of the board, said the board's decision to shut down the facility was mainly financial. "It's very expensive to run skilled nursing. Their censuses went down, and the facility is outdated in some ways. It's older and needs remodeling," Nelson said. He added that there seems to be more people using assisted living than skilled nursing. "People are staying in assisted living longer. They don't need as much care as skilled nursing," Nelson said the county would have needed to put a bond issue before voters to upgrade the building to continue offering skilled nursing services. Latah Health Services employed 74 people. Some skilled nursing staff will be absorbed by the assisted-living program.
- Washington State University is constructing a new 18-hole golf course in Pullman. The new "world-class course" should be ready for play by the spring of 2008. WSU officials expect the Palouse Ridge Golf Club to aid the regional economy by attracting tourists and retirees. Not having a home course to host golf tournaments has long been a deficiency for Washington State, officials said. It's also something that's been missing from the city of Pullman, said Fritz Hughes, executive director of the Pullman Chamber of Commerce. "It's really going to boost the local economy." College communities are great places to retire, said Pullman Mayor Glenn Johnson. They provide easy access to athletics and arts and have a youthful energy. Adding a golf course to that mix will make Pullman that much more attrac-

tive to retirees, he said. Tom Isaak, president of CourseCo, the company that will manage the golf course for the university, hopes Palouse Ridge will create a sort of regional golf trail along with other courses in the area. Coeur d'Alene is becoming a small-scale golf mecca, Isaak said, and Washington State's new course may be able to tack on to that.

Nez Perce and Asotin (Wa.) counties

- Grain harvest this year was hurt in August by intense heat. Keith Schumacher, grain division manager for Primeland Inc. in Lewiston, said overall yields are down 15 percent to 20 percent on all grains, and some wheat crops suffered test weight problems because of the heat. "The kernels were very pinched, and that was a contributing factor to the yields of the crops," Schumacher said. Despite the heat problems, overall quality was good, according to grain managers. Prices at Portland, Ore., are in the \$4-a-bushel range, which is about 40 cents higher than at this time last year. One of the biggest economic problems for farmers this year was the price of fuel, which started to climb just as the combines were beginning harvest.
- Potlatch No. 1 Federal Credit Union has started the initial phase of construction on a new branch office in Clarkston, Wash., which will serve a growing number of clients in Asotin County, Credit Union President Chris Loseth said. Asotin County residents now mostly use the credit union's Southway office. The new building will free space in the credit union's two Lewiston locations, where customer traffic is high, Loseth said. Six employees will work in the 3,700 square-foot Clarkston build-

ing when it is finished in mid-February. The project is estimated to cost \$820,000. When the branch opens, it will be Potlatch's 11th credit union location. The credit union has been adding offices to accommodate its membership base, which is growing at 12 percent annually. The two newest offices are in Culdesac and Grangeville.

- Potlatch is introducing a new coated, two-sided paperboard called ANCORA. The product is designed for in-store displays, direct mail and upscale brochures such as those that advertise automobiles and vacations. The introduction of the new paperboard is part of Potlatch's strategy to make Lewiston's pulp and paperboard operation more profitable. Pulp and paperboard lost more than \$100 million in Idaho in the last five years and is only now rebounding. The hope is ANCORA will broaden Potlatch's customer base to include more high-end users.
- The new Clearwater River Casino and Resort building has opened. After almost 10 years in the planning stage, the casino's grand opening weekend was Oct. 13-15. The new building features a non-smoking and a smoking gambling floor separated by a restaurant and gift shop. The 80,000 square-foot building, four miles east of Lewiston on U.S. Highway 95, will later include a three-story, 50-room hotel which remains under construction. As many as 125 people have worked on the construction site at any given time over the last year.

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